

Some Relevant Issues Now in Systematic Dispute

✓ It is natural for the complexity and uncertainties of choice in Vietnam to be reflected in disagreement over the prospects and merits of particular strategies. ~~But~~ before discussing individual options in detail, ^{something} ~~there~~ must be said about the state of controversy existing now ^{within} with the U.S. government, and which is highly likely to ^{not} ~~permeate~~ ^{persist} ~~will~~ into the new Administration. ^{But} Current disagreement over realities and future prospects is, ^{not only} ~~acute~~ ^{such that} (there is not even agreement, ^{in many cases,} on many issues on the relevant range of uncertainty) ^{and} fundamental; ^(disagreement) ~~And it is systematic,~~ in the coherence of sets of opinions and of opinion-holders. ^{And it is systematic cleavage} This would not emerge adequately ~~just~~ from a discussion of options one by one. ^{Its systematic nature}

There are, in fact, two principle ^{al, opposed} ~~approved~~ bodies of opinions, each ~~more or less~~ reflecting the same body of current data -- with its gaps, ambiguities, and contradictions -- but brings to it differences in experience, assumptions, ^{(perceptions of US interests,} and sense of relevance. ^{and differences of opinion which are more fundamental than} ~~(mere, it seems, than differences over fundamental US~~ ^{all cases, the fundamental differences are a fundamental US interest,} ~~interests). It is important for the President to be aware of this distinct~~ cleavage in opinion, ^(The split in views) It runs through the evaluation of each option and affects perspectives on relevant U.S. aims and alternatives as well as likely outcomes. But differences between the two groups, ~~which~~ ^{as} which will be referred to here ~~as~~ Group A and Group B -- ^e show up most clearly in their perceptions of current reality in Vietnam and of the prospects of the current military course.

One set of officials, ^(Group A) ~~comprising~~ the highest ^{elements} ~~limits~~ in JCS, MACV, AmEmbassy Saigon, some C/A analysts, and most high State officials -- believe:

1. Hanoi is negotiating currently from a sense of weakness and failure; ^{the} its very presence in Paris is ^{the} strongest sign of this.
2. VC/NVA losses in 1968 have irreversibly weakened those forces; that plus

current U.S. deployments and operations forced the withdrawal of many NVA units.

3. DRV/VC "cannot stand" the continuation of 1968 loss rates, and cannot reduce them without leaving SVN.

5. ~~HL~~ Both RVNAF and the GVN are strengthening rapidly, so much as to discourage DRV/VC hopes of ultimate political victory ~~if they can~~ ^{or at} and outlast ~~ing~~ ^{if they can only} the U.S.

6.5. Hamlet Evaluation Survey ^(HES) statistics showing a new high in ~~in~~ (hamlets rated "A," "B" or "C" = 73% of population) -- ^{indicate} received a genuinely high level and favorable trend of "population control" by the GVN. ~~Further~~ ^{discouraging to the VC/NVA}

4.6. VC/NVA forces can no longer carry out an effective offensive on the scale of Tet 1968; if they try, it will fizzle, further weakening them.

7. U.S. operations of current scale and type will lead to conditions amounting to US/^{GVN} victory: meaning ^{(throughout this paper),} the destruction or withdrawal of all NVA units in SVN, the ~~de~~struction, withdrawal or dissolution of all (or most) VC forces and apparatus, the permanent cessation of infiltration, and ^{the invaluable} unchallenged sovereignty of a stable, non-Communist regime (essentially the current GVN: radical reforms or broadening are not ^{(regarded by Group A as} essential to victory), with no significant Communist political role except on an individual, "reconciled" basis. On ~~the~~ time required ^{the} for VC or DRV to "crack" given present military programs, opinions ^{Group A} vary from almost immediately, to 18-24 months, to 3-5 years. ^{7.8.} Military escalation would shorten ~~this time~~ ^{(though} at higher cost.

^{the time needed to achieve victory} Group B -- including a minority at State, some C/A analysts, and most of ISA and Systems Analysis in the DOD and ^{most of} the U.S. Delegation in Paris -- rejects or questions all of the beliefs above. While agreeing that the VC/NVA are surely weaker and the GVN/RVNAF surely stronger to some (uncertain) extent

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compared to 6 months ago, and ^{perhaps} ~~(more-uncertainly)~~ compared to a year ago, ^{while} and U.S. deployments ^{are now} more effective, Group B believes:

1. The DRV did not go to Paris from weakness or desperation. DRV motives are uncertain, but probably include a desire to undermine the GVN and GVN/US relations, and (more importantly) a judgment ^{that} it would be less costly to negotiate the US out of SVN -- in pursuit of ultimate communist victory -- than to continue fighting for another 3-7 years.

2. ^{There is} Little reason to believe NVA units were "forced" from SVN, or cannot return. Reasons for ^{the} move are uncertain, perhaps related to Paris negotiations or to future operations.

3. Though 1968 losses were severe (especially in ^{experience} leadership and experience), DRV/VC could "stand" to replace losses at that rate, or a much higher rate, indefinitely: certainly in physical (manpower) terms of and infiltration capability, and almost ^{as} certainly in terms of resolution. Anyway, VC/NVA ^{forces} can control this rate of attrition, without quitting SVN; ^{some} 80% of combat contacts have been at their tactical initiative (i.e., they chose to suffer high losses in 1968).

4. Fundamental improvement in RVNAF and GVN is ^{US} conjectional, and doubtful. Increase in VC ^{KIA} ~~KIA~~ by RVNAF reflects ^(its increased) longer size and number of operations, ^{and} but ^{still more,} mainly increased US ^{air} ~~arm~~ and artillery support. "Reform" in GVN so far represents mainly replacement of Ky's supporters by Thieu's. The GVN/RVNAF could not have high confidence of defeating the ^{VC} ~~NVA~~ if the U.S. were to leave within the next 2 years, even if the NVA left earlier.

5. In HES statistics, "C" hamlets must be regarded as "contested," ^{not} really "GVN-controlled." "A" and "B" hamlets comprise only 25% of rural population ^{little} (no change from Jan 1967). Thus, even by these indicators, 75% of rural population are ^{still} subject to considerable VC influence and presence.

6. VC/NVA could probably inflict high casualties on US/RVNAF/GVN/civilians

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It is natural for the complexity and uncertainties of choice in Vietnam to be reflected in disagreement over the prospects and merits of particular strategies. But before discussing individual options in detail, more must be said about the state of controversy existing now with the U.S. government and which is highly likely to ^{not} permit ~~will~~ into the new Administration. Current disagreement over realities and future prospects is acute -- such that there is not even agreement on many issues on the relevant range of uncertainty -- and fundamental. ^{The controversy} And it is systematic in the coherence of sets of opinions and of opinion-holders. ^{and systematic cleavage} This ^{also} would not emerge adequately just from a discussion of options one by one.

There are, in fact, two principle ^{al} ~~approved~~ bodies of opinions, each ~~more or~~ ^{less} reflecting the same body of current data -- with its gaps, ambiguities, and contradictions -- but brings ^{ing} to it differences in experience, assumptions, ^{Differences of opinion which emerge from the data} and sense of relevance. ^{are in most, but not} (more, it seems, than differences over fundamental U.S. ^{all cases, traceable to differences over fundamental U.S. interests,} interests). It is important for the President to be aware of this distinct cleavage in opinion. It runs through the evaluation of each option and affects perspectives on relevant U.S. aims and alternatives as well as likely outcomes. But differences between the two groups -- which will be referred to here ~~as~~ Group A and Group B -- ^e show up most clearly in their perceptions of current reality in Vietnam and of the prospects of the current military course.

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5. Hamlet Evaluation Survey statistics showing a new high ~~in~~ (hamlets rated "A," "B" or "C" = 73% of population) -- ^{indicate} ~~received~~ a genuinely high level and favorable trend ⁱⁿ of "population control" by the GVN; further discouraging ~~ed~~ ^{to} the VC/NVA.

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7. U.S. operations of current scale and type will lead to conditions amounting to US/GNV victory: meaning, the destruction or withdrawal of all NVA units in SVN, the destruction, withdrawal or dissolution of all (or most) VC forces and apparatus, the permanent cessation of infiltration, and ^{the virtually} unchallenged sovereignty of a stable, non-Communist regime (essentially the current GVN: radical reforms or broadening are not essential to victory), with no significant Communist political role except on an individual, "reconciled" basis. On time required, for VC or DRV to "crack," given present military programs, opinions vary from almost immediately, to 18-24 months, to 3-5 years. Military escalation would shorten this time, at higher cost.

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in large offensive, if willing to accept high (not fatal) losses themselves.

7. Victory -- as defined above -- is not attainable by current military approach short of 4-5 years, and possibly (some would say probably, other almost certainly) not ever.

The body of data available in Washington will support to some extent either of these positions, and is inadequate to resolve any of these issues conclusively. Some uncertainties, if not controversies, (e.g., short-run trends in pacification, RVNAF and GVN improvement) might be substantially reduced by disinterested, experienced observers in SVN; others (e.g., VC/NVA capabilities, Hanoi intentions) could not. The discussion of the situation appended to the paper elaborates on the beliefs, arguments and evidence cited above and suggests some tentative judgements. But the purpose of outlining the two positions here is to provide a context for summary evaluations of the currently relevant options. Beliefs on the matters above tend to occur, for a given individual, in the clusters which will simply be described as "Group A beliefs" or "Group B beliefs." But members of each group disagree, of course, on other relevant judgments, which leads to disagreements over preferred options. (Though, Group A tends to favor Options 1 or 2, with the aim of victory, while Group B favors Options 4 through 7, with the aim of compromise settlement, better or worse, and US extrication. A few, members of each group favor Option 3, with the aim of victory).